

Jonathan Alexander

Anthem for Wilfred Owen

At seventeen, I knew nothing
of war, but I could read between

the lines of your poems: foreheads of
youth and innocent tongues, strange

meetings and smothering dreams,
limbs full nerved but too hard to

stir, and the hanging face, sick of
sin—but whose sin was it that kept you

dreaming? What stuttering vision
choked on the old lie?

*In all my dreams
he plunges at me . . .*

This is not their war. They would not
know it as you exploded with the brush

of a boy, barely seventeen, drowning
in floating fire. Some truths lie too deep for

taint. Death leaked around you like
poison gas, but you stopped to notice

the clumsy youth fumbling his
helmet and coughing up a prayer,

or the dark-haired boys dying as
cattle while the holy glimmers of

blondes fought at your side for king
and country and a smile from their

captain. You nursed the tenderness of
patient minds and recorded

futility, a simple request:
“Move him into the sun . . .”

But all the while the old lie kept
you marching in your sleep

while others would see you
drowning.

Jonathan Alexander's most recent work appears in *Blithe House Quarterly*, *Valparaiso Poetry Review*, *Heart Quarterly*, *Salt River Review*, and *Chiron Review*. He teaches writing at the University of Cincinnati.